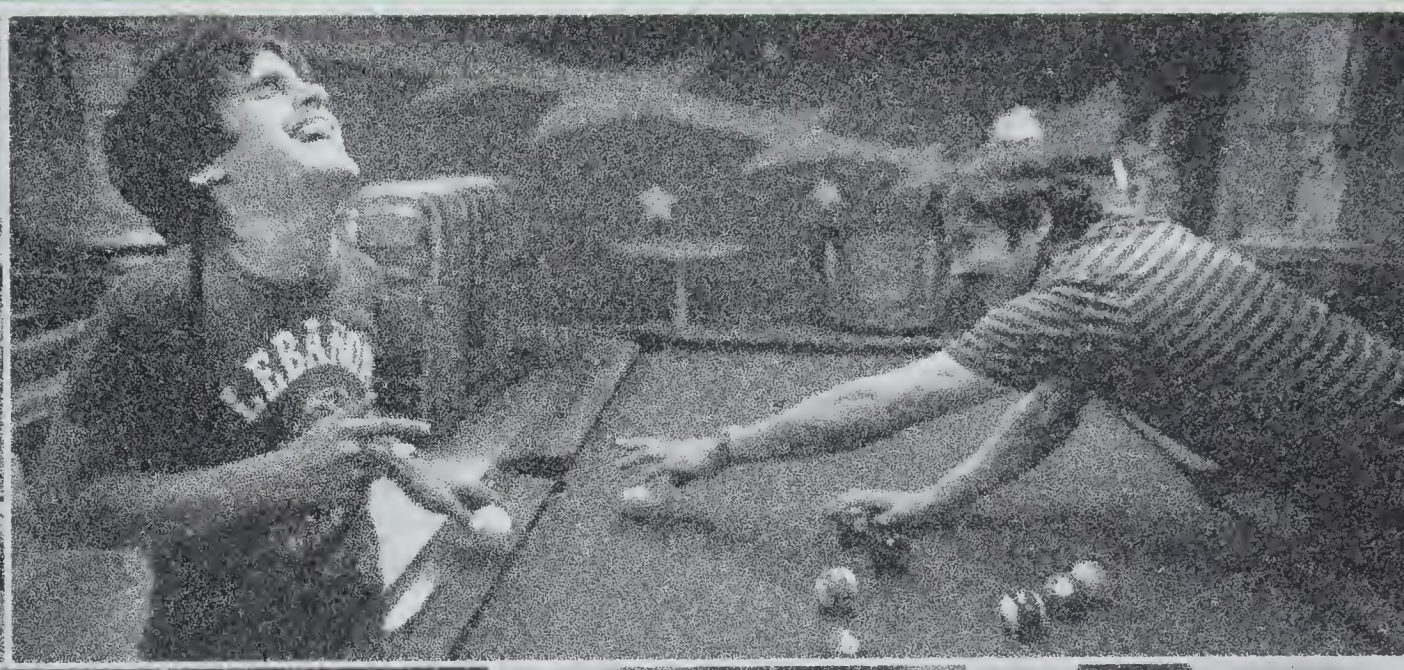
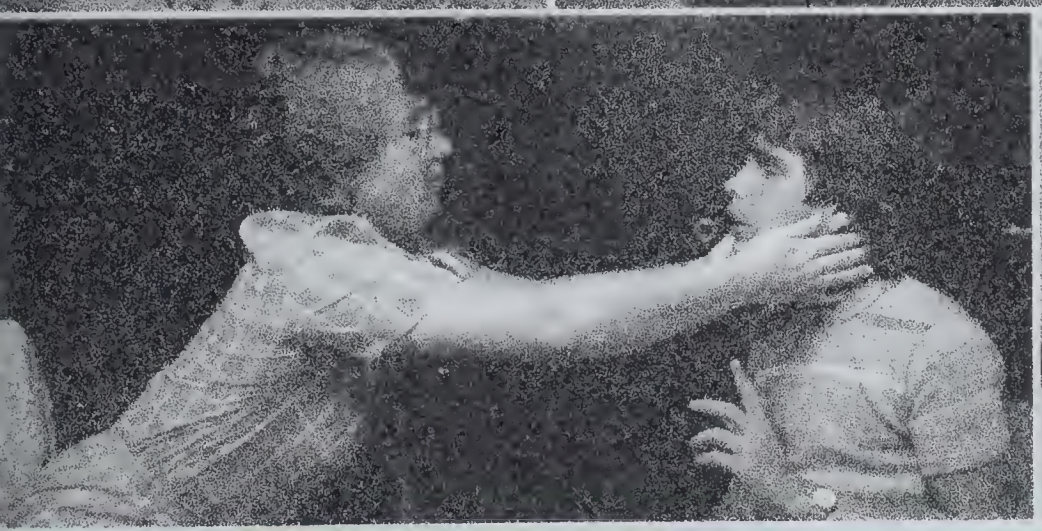
Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children





Annual Report 1984-85

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Assistant Night Coordinator

* *as of July 1, 1985*

Annual Report 1984-85

The annual report this year focuses on the diverse and special sources of funding which lift our programs out of the realm of the ordinary into levels of excellence. In a way, this report can be read as a special thank you to those who have contributed to our success.

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The Year in Review

Annual report time is always a time for reflection and contemplation. This year our reflections brought a pleasant glow of satisfaction. This has been an especially good year for the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children, a year in which we find ourselves well positioned for the demands of the future.

One significant event was the appointment of a new executive director. Janet Simon, Ph.D., assumed the position on March 28. Dr. Simon has spent most of her professional career at the School and has already exerted firm educational leadership and a creative approach to management. With Dr. Simon the School can look forward to a long period of stability and progress in pursuing its course.

The mission of the School was reiterated this year when the Board of Directors concluded the conceptual phase of a long-range planning effort. The Board adopted a resolution reaffirming its commitment to the education of blind children regardless of the severity of other handicaps. In the next phase of its long-range planning activity, the Board will evaluate the School's physical plant. Many facilities must be altered or redesigned to improve our ability to accommodate the needs of severely handicapped children and to provide for their safety and mobility.

Enrollment was stable at 170 students, though there are signs that the population will increase. Twenty students, many under the age of five, were newly enrolled at the School. We accept children beginning at age two and we can start working with families as soon as a child's blindness is diagnosed. We continue to get many referrals from throughout Western Pennsylvania and we expect twenty-eight new students for the 1985-86 school year.

Financial management is always a delicate balancing act. With the expert leadership and involvement of the Board of Directors, our long term assets have been wisely invested and income from our endowment enables us to make much-needed capital improvements. Last year we spent more than $1 million on construction to transform our main building into a facility more suitable for multihandicapped children. Two former courtyards were enclosed and converted to provide new dining

areas, a small conference room, additional dormitory and classroom space and a diagnostic center for the school psychologist.

We have greatly enlarged and modernized our food service operation. Our kitchen serves three meals a day to children, many of whom require special feeding or restrictive diets. To accomplish this difficult task, we instituted a highly sophisticated food service system which enables us to serve the dining rooms and non-dining room settings. About one-third of our students receive their meals in Aladdin trays which have the special diets and feeding instructions marked clearly on the covers of the trays.

Our basic education program is funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Currently the School is reimbursed at a favorable rate for the services we provide but this does not cover all of our expenses. To fund the special health care needs of our students, for demonstration projects, for research and other important program components, we rely on support from foundations, government and private benefactors.

Philanthropic foundations made grants last year totalling $77,400, an increase over previous years. Foundation monies are used for educational enrichment programs which enable our students to work on special skills.

The School was very pleased to be chosen as a recipient of $400,000 in federal funds earmarked for the vocational training of deaf/blind adolescents. The training is supported by a

grant from Innovative Programs for Severely Handicapped Children, U.S. Department of Education. This will be a joint venture between three local institutions: the School, the Pittsburgh Blind Association and Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic. This training, to begin in the fall, will enable severely handicapped deaf/blind individuals to engage in productive work. The School will design and coordinate the basic educational component of the program.

Private monies are crucial to the School. Last year we received $153,000 in contributions from individuals, civic clubs and organizations. When one realizes that the School spends about $200,000 a year to buy adapted equipment—such items as special furniture, wheelchairs and cribs—the value of this money becomes clear.

The Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children is one of a small group of schools in the Commonwealth which is both publicly and privately supported. The core of our support comes from the state. It is important, therefore, for those in the Department of Education and the Legislature to understand our programs and to know us better. In March, the School hosted a reception for Dr. Kay Wright, the newly appointed Commissioner of Basic Education. She toured the School and observed classroom teaching. In June, we held a legislative reception in Harrisburg which was attended by Secretary of Education Margaret Smith, representatives of the Department of Education and key members of the General Assembly and Senate.

Approximately 150 members of our staff, including teachers, child care workers, nurses and houseparents, are represented by a collective bargaining agreement. The School negotiated a new agreement this year, well in advance of the expiration of the current contract, insuring stability for the next three years. The new agreement reflects a constructive collective bargaining atmosphere.

The Board of Directors gave special recognition to two members of the School's community. Eugene Kimmick, maintenance supervisor, retired after 30 years of service. Board member Howard Womsley celebrated a 50 year association with the School, which included an active involvement in many phases of the School's development. The dedication and loyalty of both of these men has been an invaluable asset to the School.

In other news from the Board, Mrs. William J. Connelly, Jr., and Wesley von Schack were elected as Directors at the Annual Meeting in September. Mrs. Thomas P. Eddy resigned from her position after twelve years of faithful service. The School was saddened by the death of Director Edwin J. Brueggman.

For our students, this has also been a very fine year. The more we work with severely disabled youngsters, the more we are able to help them gain a certain mastery over their environment. We have seen our more able students excel in sports this year, gain in confidence and independence and enjoy the benefits provided by an enthusiastic and caring staff. As you will see from this annual report, many forces came together to provide what we believe is a superior education for those who attend this School.

Our Basic Direction

Education is the most central function of any school. Education at the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children is a complex undertaking, requiring a highly specialized staff, much adapted equipment, a lot of love and support and—yes—a great deal of money. The education program is funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, via the Department of Education. Last year the Commonwealth appropriated $5 million, and those funds were used to pay for the two main education programs within the School: the Multihandicapped Program and the Visually Impaired Program.

Jason's ride on the jetmobile is not just for fun. As Jason learns to propel himself across the floor manually, eventually his hands should loosen into a more normal position.

Heather is not totally blind. Susan Aach, special education teacher, is teaching Heather to use the vision she has. The goal is for Heather to look at the cup, reach for it, get it to her mouth and drink the juice!

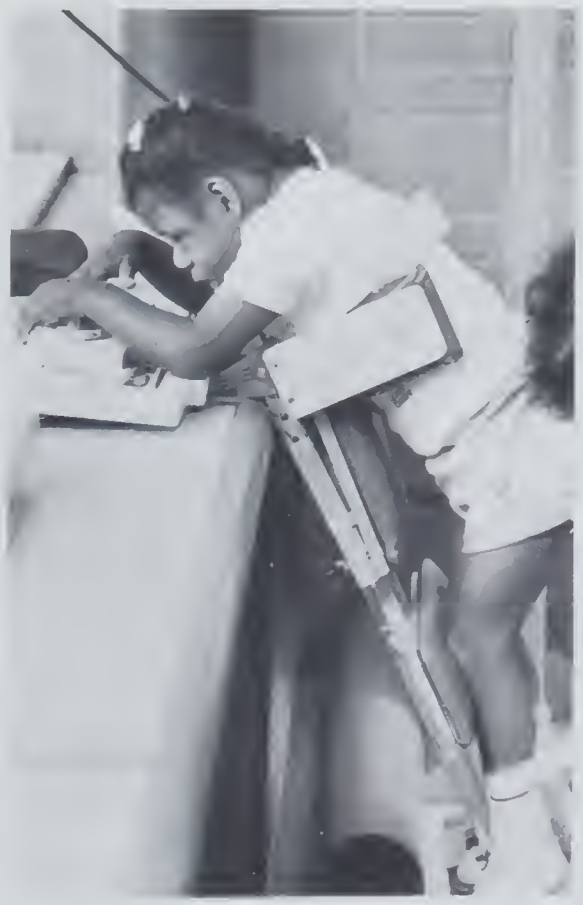
A wheelchair can also be used to help with independent walking. Here Russell gets encouragement to take independent steps from physical therapist Jackie Righetti and therapist aide Bob Hamilton.

For the Multihandicapped

Students enrolled in this program are severely and profoundly handicapped. What this means is that they are able to learn many adaptive skills but they will need supervision and assistance throughout their lives. Last year, 106 students, aged two to twenty-one, were in the Multihandicapped Program. Their visual handicaps are compounded by retardation or developmental delays.

The children spend six-and-a-half hours a day in a classroom setting, working with teachers, aides, occupational and physical therapists and other specialists. They work on skills as basic as learning to communicate yes and no, on tasks as difficult as dressing oneself and on concepts as abstract as cause and effect. Socialization is an important part of their program and because most of these students live at the School, their work with the staff extends well into the evening. The goal is to provide these children with as much independence as possible and to give them a rich and rewarding environment.

For a visually handicapped child, locating and identifying common objects is vitally important. Here teacher Marianne Farnan works with Gina to help her locate a plate and spoon.



Occupational therapist Andee Aaby works with Natasha to improve her stance. Natasha tends to move forward and backward in a straight plane. Andee is helping her to rotate in a more normal pattern.

For the Visually Impaired

The Visually Impaired Program was originally conceived for students with one handicap, the inability to see. But like so much at the School, the program is changing. Many of the 64 students enrolled in this academically oriented program have additional lesser handicaps, making their progress more difficult.

Those accepted into the Visually Impaired Program need the ability to profit from traditional academic work, to reason abstractly, to socialize and to work independently. The challenge, says supervisor Tony Evancic, "is to find out where the child is in his skills and to build from there."

The education is highly individualized, with a large staff. In addition to the traditional academic subjects, students learn how to control their environment through courses such as food preparation, daily living skills, and orientation and mobility.

Equipment is an important aid to communication. Here a student uses the braillewriter.

A closed circuit television set which enlarges letters, helps low vision youngsters use their limited eyesight.

The program is supported by the Pa. Department of Education. The emphasis is on giving handicapped students as many advantages as possible. Technology has made a real difference to today's visually impaired student. The optacon, for example, translates print letters into tactile impulses which can be felt or read with the fingers. The Kurzweil reading machine actually reads print materials and, through synthesized speech, conveys it in an audible voice.

The School's library is rich in devices which enable blind students to store and transcribe information in easily retrievable form.

An Apple IIe computer with sound is helping low vision youngsters learn to use the sight they have. These are the children who have a limited ability to see and need training to use that sight.

Another new type of technology is the VersaBraille, a machine which writes on cassette tape. This portable device is a combination computer/braille writer/cassette player. It is a good note-taking tool, enabling the student to store material on a small cassette rather than on paper.

The increasing use of computers may bring new career opportunities to visually impaired young people. Evancic believes that, in the future, blind students will be able to interact more completely with computers. He says, "This is an evolving thing, still in an early stage, but it promises hope to our students."

Living Off Campus at Moorhead Towers

For most teenagers, living on one's own in an apartment is just a dream. For students at the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children, that dream can be a reality, thanks to the Independent Living Program at Moorhead Towers.

In 1982, under the auspices of the McCune Foundation, the School rented an apartment in Moorhead Towers, a 12-story apartment complex designed for the handicapped. Students from the School live almost on their own, two at a time, for periods of 16 weeks. With them during their stay is houseparent Carrie Carter, whose function is to smooth the way as the students move out into the world around them.

Frightening, exhilarating, frustrating and enriching—the experience of learning to negotiate the risky and wonderful world of city streets, retail stores and new social settings is all this and more. The young people wrestle with supermarket layouts and misplaced shopping lists and discipline themselves to cook their own dinners, eat their own cooking and do their own dishes. Though Carrie is there to help them, the students take on whole new levels of responsibility.

The beauty of the program is that it accommodates a wide range of students, from the most independent to those who will never live entirely on their own. For those who try Independent Living, it is a time of growth, of new-found confidence, of gleaming memories.

Donna's Experience

Donna Rice may be shy when asked to describe her four month experience at Moorhead Towers, but she becomes more and more confident as she recalls her daily and weekly routines, her favorite meals and her least favorite chores.

A student at the School for 13 years, Donna will graduate in 1986. Last year she and a classmate joined Carrie Carter at the Moorhead Towers apartment. During their stay they learned to organize their time, plan meals and shopping, entertain friends and relatives and share household tasks. They also had a lot of fun.

Living independently required good organization, and each day had its own routine. The weekly routine may seem rigid to the non-handicapped observer, but it insured the chores were completed and meals prepared with time left for leisure and enjoyment.

By 7:30 in the morning, Donna was already dressed, with her bed made. She liked to cook breakfast, especially eggs, bacon made in the microwave, and toast. By 8 a.m. Donna was ready to leave for school.

The walk from Moorhead Towers to the School could be negotiated in about fifteen minutes, in plenty of time for an 8:30 class. When classes recessed at 3:30, the evening routine began.

Thursday was laundry day while Monday and Wednesday found the girls at the supermarket with a prepared shopping list. With experience, the roommates were able to cut the length of their shopping trip from two-and-a-half hours to one hour. Donna says, "The biggest hold-up was how many people were in the Giant Eagle. We usually were home and ready to start dinner by five o'clock."

The girls took turns preparing supper and cleaning the apartment. "Pork chops, noodles and peas were my favorites to cook—and to eat," Donna recalls. On most nights dinner was ready by six and the kitchen cleaned up in time to watch the daily lottery at seven o'clock. Evenings were reserved for television, word games, homework or social activities held in Moorhead Towers. By 9:30 or 10:00, the roommates were ready for bed.

C.A.P.—A Special Summer Experience

"Trust is very important, especially to a blind person. And I'm always learning to trust myself as I learn to do new things."
Lisa, 1985 C.A.P. participant

A blind student today, one with no other handicaps, will most likely be "mainstreamed" into a public school classroom, a setting which enables the student to compete more successfully in the sighted world but which may fail to teach some of the special skills that provide for full independence. That is where C.A.P. comes in.

The Community Adjustment Program, or C.A.P., is a four-week summer program which was funded in 1985 by the Kiwanis Conference. C.A.P. provides non-academic training—skills like mobility and orientation, food preparation, clothing care and personal hygiene—to visually handicapped students. Some of these skills may be taught elsewhere, but not in such a formalized, concerted way as at the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children, with its one hundred years of experience.

For many years, the Kiwanis Conference has supported special programs at the School. The commitment of the membership has provided blind youngsters with varied experiences and special help. The Community Adjustment Program has been offered this year with Kiwanis Conference help.

Tentatively and then more confidently, with the help of their instructors, C.A.P. students maneuver their way through the halls of the School, then onto the streets of Oakland. Their skill in the kitchen progresses by leaps and bounds, from the frying of a lowly egg to the creation of a lump-free white sauce. Sewing on a button or shortening a hem—jobs that stymie many a sighted person—are taken in stride by these young people.

Tammi's most spectacular creation was a white sauce. "Not to brag," she says, "but it came out right." Says Lisa, "I've gotten much more confidence."

Lisa, 17, and Tammi, 15, shared their Moorhead Towers experience and became friends along the way. Lisa, two years older than Tammi, often led the way, but Tammi added an element of perfectionism.

Midway through the program, one student eagerly awaits the chance to let others in on a newly acquired skill—a safe and efficient way to cube a tomato. As she demonstrates she says, "This is so easy you could do it blindfolded. Wait until I show this to my mother!"

The best part of the C.A.P. program is the opportunity it gives blind students to learn and to socialize with others like themselves. Says one participant, "It's important to be with sighted people, but it's also nice to learn things with other blind kids. I'm not as embarrassed to try to eat spaghetti when I know that everyone else is having just as much trouble."

C.A.P. students spend time at Moorhead Towers, in an apartment maintained by the School. For some, a night at Moorhead Towers represents the first time spent away from home. For others, it is a special time to exchange confidences with a blind friend.

Throughout the program parental involvement and feedback is encouraged. When students go home on weekends, their parents are often surprised at how much they have learned. At the end of the program, parents are asked to evaluate their child's progress. By involving parents, the summer program extends into the home and strengthens the independence that each student works so hard to achieve.

The results of the C.A.P. program are as tangible as making a neat bed, as intangible as learning to trust oneself, and as wonderful as making a new friend.

Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children

Your Contributions

Your contributions to the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children are used to improve programs in ways that are tangible to all of us. Please take this opportunity to insure another year of excellence at the School.

Name _____

Address _____

_____ _____ _____ _____
City County State Zip

Telephone _____

Make checks payable to ***Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children*** and return in enclosed envelope or mail to:

Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children
Bayard Street at Bellefield Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Memorials and Honors

Many people now donate to charity in times of bereavement or to honor special occasions such as a birthday, anniversary or recovery from an illness. For a contribution of $10 or more, we acknowledge your donation with a card, and no amount is mentioned.

For further information about deferred giving or memorial contributions, call the School at 412/621-0100.

Place
Stamp
Here

Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children
Bayard Street at Bellefield Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213-1499

Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children

Operating Funds for Fiscal Year Ending 6-30-85

Revenues	
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania—1984-1985 Appropriation	$ 4,976,000
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania—Compensatory Programs	173,300
Intermediate Units—Summer School	97,600
Federal—National Institute of Handicapped Research	116,100
Federal—Handicapped Children's Early Education Fund	94,200
Foundation Grants	77,400
Individual Contributions	108,100
Grants—Civic Organizations	44,500
Short-Term Investment Income	280,600
Contributed Books, Food, and Other	78,700
TOTAL REVENUES	$ 6,046,500
Expenses	
Salaries	$ 3,900,400
Fringe Benefits	1,062,900
Supplies	262,800
Contracted Services	252,900
Other Expenses	624,400
Depreciation	350,000
TOTAL EXPENSES	$ 6,453,400
Excess of Expenses over Revenues absorbed by the Endowment Fund	($ 406,900)

The Financial Statements of the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children are subject to audit by the independent certified public accountants firm, KMG Main Hurdman.

The operating funds statement shown above reflects the current operating results of the school operating, general purpose, development, and special projects funds. During the year, the 1982-1983 school year audit was completed by the state. The audit resulted in the school receiving an additional $619,000 from the Department of Education, for the 1982-1983 school year.

Information about these statements will be made available upon request.

One Parent and the PTO

How do you measure a contribution? Take Cheryl Akers, for instance. Cheryl, whose 15 year-old son Bobby is a student at the School, served for three years as fundraising chairman of the Parent-Teacher Organization and three more years as PTO president. That doesn't even begin to suggest the days she spent working on activities, the endless letters to legislators, the mimeographed sheets she designed and ran off, or even the money she put up for one thing or another.

But it's not a one way street. "I've grown a lot personally," Cheryl says. "It was very important for me to make friends with other parents. We have all gone through the same experiences."

To understand Cheryl you really have to know something about Bobby, her multihandicapped son. When Bobby entered the School, 11 years ago, he was antisocial, very aggressive and he exhibited a lot of the characteristics of autism. Says Cheryl, who grew up in Williamsport, Pa., "I came to Pittsburgh for this school. I had a child with vision and emotional problems and there were no services where I lived. I came here because they were willing to take Bobby into the program. He was legally blind, severely retarded and he did not fit into a classroom setting."

Today Bobby enjoys the classroom and other social occasions. Much of the anxiety that Cheryl used to feel when Bobby was in a new situation—just waiting for him to explode out of control in a violent tantrum —has disappeared. "I'm extremely proud of Bobby," she says. "He's a neat kid."

For Cheryl, being a concerned parent was not enough. She also became an involved parent. "It was important for me to become active in the PTO," she says. "Bobby is my only child."

Almost every school has a PTO but the one at the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children is different. It has so many roles to play.

For the parents of handicapped children, the PTO is crucial. Many of the School's parents are active, which is astounding when you remember that the students come from 33 counties in Western Pennsylvania. PTO programs are designed to help parents in concrete ways. At one recent meeting, representatives of 25 organizations brought information about their services so parents could learn what help is available to them. At another meeting, an attorney spoke on the subject of wills and their importance in providing future funds and care for their multihandicapped child.

The PTO looks out for the students. "Some of the children come from institutions or they live so far away that their parents cannot easily visit," Cheryl explains, "so the parents who are close by have a responsibility to be available and to let the staff know we care about all of these kids." Cheryl herself loves to visit the classroom. She says, "When a child first comes here, you tend to see the handicaps. Then you begin to see the child and the handicaps fade into the background."

Christmas is a time when the PTO likes to do something special for the children. The group runs a Christmas Corner, a little gift shop where children can purchase gifts for friends and family at prices ranging from twenty-five cents to one dollar. At the same time the PTO holds a Christmas party, complete with entertainment, refreshments and gifts.

Another important function of the PTO is to be an advocate for the handicapped child. The organization was active in lobbying for passage of Public Law 94-142 and in informing parents about their rights under the law. "We keep an eye out to what is happening in Harrisburg and Washington, D.C." Cheryl points out. "Our kids are in a minority, but we are taxpayers. We do have influence and we do keep our members informed."

Finally, the PTO reaches out to all elements of the School, particularly fostering communication between parents, faculty, administration and the board of directors. One PTO meeting featured a panel which included staff and parents. "It's good for this staff to be able to sit down and talk openly with parents," Cheryl believes.

How do you measure a contribution? The PTO budget last year approached $6,000 and most of it was spent on students. The PTO spent $1,000 to buy uniforms for children competing in Sports By Ability, $600 for physical therapy, $100 for the WPSBC underprivileged children's fund, plus money for parties, for gifts, for special treats . . .

And on the other side, what is the measure? Personal growth, new friendships, and deepening relationships.

"Let the Games Begin . . ."

The excitement of the competition begins months before the actual games and mounts until it touches every student at the School.

First it's just the athletes. They must qualify for the Sports by Ability games by demonstrating that they have achieved minimum competitive levels. Then comes three months of training and conditioning in the pool or the gym to raise their performance level.

During the last few weeks, the whole school gets involved. In classrooms, students make signs to support their athletes. The staff meets for an orientation. Everyone joins for a pep rally to spur on the athletes who will go to the games.

Sports by Ability is a competitive program for the handicapped. It is run by Citiparks and sponsored by Sargent Electric. The School's participation, however, is funded through private contributions. Last year 23 students from the School participated in the local Sports by Ability and their number is growing each year.

At the games themselves, students participate in swimming, power lifting and slalom. The athletes are primed for new situations, unfamiliar equipment and the noise and confusion of the games. Swimmers prepare themselves for the entry into a strange pool and listen carefully for the verbal cues of coach Deanie Caputo as she advises them to turn at the wall.

After the games, there's a banquet at the School. This is a time to recognize the accomplishments of the athletes, to thank the volunteer escorts and to thank the parents. Says Caputo, "The banquet is a beautiful way to let the parents hear of the accomplishments of their children. It's a wonderful event. The athletes feel as if they have worked hard and participated in serious competition. There is an atmosphere of discipline, learning, achievement and success. What more can you ask?"

This year four blind athletes from the School attended national championships in Montclair, N.J.

Caputo is an advocate for handicapped athletes. The games "bring us out of the realm of severe disability for a few weeks because they focus on ability," she points out. "The motivation of the games is intense. Kids that have come to us as non-swimmers become agile swimmers because of their desire to be part of the games."

In order to compete in Sports by Ability, the athletes need membership in another association, the United States Association of Blind Athletes. For the first time this year, four athletes from the School participated in the National Competition of the U.S.A.B.A. in Montclair, N.J. The four came home with five awards, including gold and silver medals, two bronze medals and a second place team standing.

For Becky and Tony, the Sports by Ability Games were worth all the weeks of training.

Getting to the games was tough. "The School supported us financially," Caputo notes, "but it was touch and go for a while because we didn't have enough money. Finally we got an individual contribution of $2,000 which enabled us to go to the games."

The national competition was an exhilarating, broadening experience for the School's athletes. The competitors ranged in age from 12 to 74. They were well groomed, well conditioned and highly accomplished. They were shining examples of what can be achieved through perseverance, determination and discipline.

C

Your Gifts—How They Help

Your contributions pay for valuable improvements. The School spends about $200,000 per year on capital equipment and adapted equipment. Every time a child needs a chair or other supportive device, it must be specially adapted. The School retains a wood craftsman who comes in, looks at the individual child and adapts the equipment to fit the child at that moment. When that child starts to grow, we start all over again. Some of the equipment has a very short life.

These purchases, made during the last year, are examples of how your contributions are used.

Hospital crib	$1,000
Six cart covers for tray transporting to the Early Education Building	$ 950
Food cart	$ 295
Wheelchair	$ 390
Guidance kit	$ 193
Science lab kit	$ 280
26 bed rail covers and pads	$ 715
10 student desks	$ 481
Shower chair	$ 225
Converter bike	$ 158
Potty chair	$ 120
Adaptive chairs	$ 700
Evacuation chair	$ 625
Changing table	$ 200
2 Preston Tumbleforms	$ 520
Torso dummy	$ 290
Kidney shaped table	$ 260
Bolster chair	$ 235
Library wordprocessing workstation	$3,800
Disk Pacs and Storage Cabinet	$1,800

Benefactors and Bequests

Louis I. Aaron
*Anna Elizabeth Abbott
William M. Achhammer
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Abraham Adelman
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Virginia Aiken
Charles M. Alexander
Grace R. Alster
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